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National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report, covering activities for the period from July 2001 through July 2003 contains information on the activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to establish and strengthen national institutions; the measures taken by Governments and national institutions in this regard; the support provided to regional activities of national human rights institutions; and the consultations held by treaty bodies and special mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights with national institutions. Information regarding the work of national institutions in respect of specific thematic issues is also included. Additional information on assistance provided to national institutions can be found in the OHCHR reports on activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights.

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** As the report covers the period from July 2001 through July 2003, the report could not be submitted by the 25 July slotted date.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 56/158 of 19 December 2001. It covers activities for the period from July 2001 through July 2003 and complements the annual reports presented to the Commission on Human Rights during that period (E/CN.4/2002/114 and E/CN.4/2003/110). More information on assistance to national human rights institutions can be found in the reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights, the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, and the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as on the web site of the national institutions (http://www.nhri.net).

II. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and national institutions

2. In his report of 9 September 2002 to the General Assembly (A/57/387 and Corr.1), the Secretary-General stressed that "The capacity of the United Nations to help individual countries to build strong human rights institutions will be strengthened. ... Building strong human rights institutions at the country level is what in the long run will ensure that human rights are protected and advanced in a sustained manner. The emplacement or enhancement of a national protection system in each country, reflecting international human rights norms, should therefore be a principal objective of the Organization. These activities are especially important in countries emerging from conflict."

3. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights attaches great importance to the role that national institutions play in translating international human rights norms into laws, policies and practices that ensure respect for human rights at the local level. The establishment and strengthening of national institutions is a key objective of the Office of the High Commissioner and a major component of its programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights. The High Commissioner regularly holds consultations with members and senior staff of national human rights institutions of different countries. In his closing statement to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission of Human Rights, the High Commissioner emphasized the increasingly active role played by national human rights institutions in advancing the cause of human rights and suggested that appropriate time, importance and attention be accorded to them at the next session of the Commission.

4. The activities of the High Commissioner regarding national institutions are undertaken with the support of the OHCHR National Institutions Team. Practical advice is given to Governments on an appropriate constitutional or legislative framework for any new national institution and on the nature, functions, powers and responsibilities of such institutions. Support is provided to new and/or established national human rights institutions in the design of effective management structures and strategic plans, complaints-handling systems, human rights education and training programmes and their implementation, and the provision of human rights information and documentation. International and regional meetings of national

institutions are facilitated to encourage the sharing of experience and the development of best practices.

5. The work of OHCHR in the area of national institutions is guided by the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993. The High Commissioner supports programmes designed to strengthen and support a number of existing institutions that do not fully comply with these principles, but are willing to strengthen their independence and effectiveness.

6. In order to address the increasing interest in the work of national institutions, the National Institutions Team was strengthened by two new members in January 2003. This will help institutionalize the work of the National Institutions Team in OHCHR and reinforce cooperation with the different branches of the Office and, in particular, with the Geographic Team of the Activities and Programmes Branch.

A. Advisory services for the establishment of national institutions

7. During the past two years, OHCHR has provided information, advice or assistance, at the request of Governments or entities, in the process of establishing, or considering the establishment of national human rights institutions in Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Côte d'Ivoire, Fiji, Germany, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Serbia and Montenegro, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Timor-Leste and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Scotland).

8. The Office has also provided information, advice or material support to several established national human rights institutions, including the 43 national institutions fully accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, newly established national institutions (Jordan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand), as well as other institutions.

9. During the reporting period, OHCHR held high-level meetings, seminars and workshops to provide advice or assistance to Governments; held consultations with government officials, parliamentarians, established national institutions, non-governmental organizations and representatives from the academic sector; conducted technical cooperation needs-assessment and project-formulation missions; held meetings of the steering committees of technical cooperation projects; carried out joint activities with such organizations as the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as with other United Nations agencies and programmes; conducted missions to countries in the process of establishing national human rights institutions; and provided training to staff of national human rights institutions and senior staff of other United Nations agencies and programmes.

10. In addition, OHCHR responded to numerous requests from Governments and non-governmental organizations seeking general information concerning national human rights institutions. The rapidly increasing number of national human rights institutions received periodic information on human rights meetings and the activities of the Office, United Nations publications, and material relating to the

Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the rights of persons with disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

11. To further strengthen the overall technical cooperation programme on national human rights institutions, OHCHR continued to expand its roster of consultants and experts/practitioners on national human rights institutions, compile legislation of national human rights institutions established in accordance with the Paris Principles and compile the best practices of national human rights institutions with regard to their work on thematic issues such as racism and the promotion and protection of children's and women's rights, as well as best practices relating to their functions and operations.

B. Support to international initiatives

1. International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

12. The National Institutions Team is the secretariat of the International Coordinating Committee, providing it with relevant information and facilitating the holding of its meetings. During the reporting period, the Committee held its tenth and eleventh sessions. The Credentials Committee of the International Coordinating Committee acts in its independent capacity, but its work is facilitated by the National Institutions Team. The Committee generally meets during the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights.

2. Sixth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions

13. The Sixth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions was held in Copenhagen and Lund, Sweden, from 10 to 13 April 2002. The Conference was organized by the Danish Institute for Human Rights and the Swedish Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, in cooperation with the Chair of the International Coordinating Committee and OHCHR, and with the financial support of OHCHR and the Governments of Denmark and Sweden. The Conference had over 100 participants from a wide array of national institutions worldwide.

14. The overall theme of the Conference was the role of national institutions in combating racial discrimination, as a follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The Conference shed light on the crucial role of national institutions in combating racial discrimination and, inter alia, discussed best practices in promoting tolerance through education and the media. Moreover, there was a focus on remedies, including the handling of complaints, as well as on the monitoring and advocacy function of the institutions in relation to racial discrimination. The aim was to develop a catalogue of best practices and strategies for national institutions in their fight against racial discrimination.

3. Other conferences

15. The National Institutions Team participated in the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung Conference on Targeting Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Democracy:

Perspectives for NGOs, held in Leipzig, Germany, from 12 to 15 September 2002. This was the second conference of its kind in which the Team participated in efforts to broaden knowledge about national institutions. In this particular instance the importance of such institutions in creating a culture of human rights was emphasized.

4. Information and education activities

16. The National Institutions Team developed, with the Danish Institute for Human Rights, a web site on national human rights institutions (www.nhri.net) which is linked to all existing national institutions' web sites and to the OHCHR main web page. This web site is a useful tool for the exchange of information between national institutions and the sharing of best practices. Many of the documents dealing with the events noted in the present report may be found on this web site.

C. Support to regional initiatives

1. The Americas and the Caribbean

Network of National Human Rights Institutions of the Americas

17. The Network of National Human Rights Institutions of the Americas, created in 2000, held its first General Assembly in March 2002 in Kingston and its second General Assembly in San José, in March 2003. The Network now has 14 members: the national institutions of Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. The National Human Rights Commission of Mexico is the Network's ad interim secretariat. The General Assembly of the Americas Network adopted its rules of procedures and elected the Coordinating Committee of the Network, composed of the national institutions of Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica and Mexico.

18. The national institutions participating in the meeting agreed to strengthen cooperation with OHCHR, the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions, the Organization of American States, as well as with the Caribbean Ombudsman Association, the Andean Council of Ombudsmen (Consejo Andino de Defensores del Pueblo), the Central American Council of Ombudsmen (Consejo Centroamericanos de Procuradores de Derechos Humanos), and the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen. The first General Assembly was followed by a one-day workshop on the rights of indigenous people, and the second by a workshop on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Caribbean Ombudsman Association

19. The OHCHR participated in the Second Regional Conference of the Caribbean Ombudsman Association, held in Trinidad and Tobago from 7 to 10 May 2002. The participants in the Conference focused on the important role of national institutions and the Caribbean Ombudsman Association in assisting Governments to tackle poverty and recognized that violations of human rights constitute maladministration and therefore are the concern of the Association.

2. Africa

Fourth Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions

20. The Fourth Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions was held in Kampala from 14 to 16 August 2002. The Conference, with the support and participation of OHCHR, had as its overall theme "A rights-based approach to development". Four thematic issues were discussed: human rights-based approaches to development strategies and challenges; managing conflict in Africa for sustainable development; the role of civil society in promoting good governance; and the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. In addition, participants decided to establish a Permanent Secretariat for African National Human Rights Institutions, to be hosted for the first three years by the South African Human Rights Commission. OHCHR has been working with the Commission on a package of support for the Permanent Secretariat. The Uganda Human Rights Commission was elected as the new Chair of the Coordinating Committee of African National Human Rights Institutions.

Meeting of Southern, Central and Eastern African National Institutions

21. OHCHR supported the Meeting of Southern, Central and Eastern African National Institutions, which was held in Lusaka from 26 to 29 June 2002 and organized by the Zambia Human Rights Commission in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Participants discussed the importance of strengthening subregional cooperation; lessons in the promotion and protection of human rights; constitutional experiences, research and education in the work of a human rights commission; and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Training workshop on the implementation of human rights instruments in Southern Africa (Mbabane, 9-13 June, 2003)

22. Following previous assistance provided by OHCHR in the region, it was agreed among the national partners that a cluster workshop would be organized for six or seven countries in the region which share a common language and concerns. Most countries in the region requested that the OHCHR Regional Office organize a training workshop to strengthen the capacities of government officials in charge of the design and enforcement of laws, human rights implementation mechanisms and monitoring and reporting to treaty bodies. The workshop focused, inter alia, on the role of OHCHR and how it provided support to States and national human rights promotion and protection institutions under its technical assistance programme. The team leader of the National Institutions Team addressed participants on the functions and role of national institutions.

3. Asia and the Pacific

Tenth and Eleventh Workshops on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region

23. OHCHR participated and supported the involvement of national institutions in the Tenth Workshop on Regional Cooperation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific Region, held in Beirut from 4 to 6 March 2002, and the Eleventh Workshop, held in Islamabad from 25 to 27 February 2003. Prior to the official meetings, national institutions and civil society met to discuss the

Framework for Regional Cooperation in the Asia and Pacific Region, adopted at the Sixth Workshop, held in Tehran, and future activities within the region.

24. Participating States called for further strengthening of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights in many countries of the region and reaffirmed that national institutions should be established following an appropriate and inclusive process of consultation; they also reaffirmed that the status and responsibilities of national institutions should be consistent with the Paris Principles.

25. States welcomed the support provided by OHCHR to the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, encouraged the Office to continue to provide technical cooperation, at the request of Governments, for the development of national institutions and requested OHCHR to promote and facilitate cooperation between Governments, civil society and national institutions.

Annual meetings of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

26. The Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions held its sixth annual meeting in Colombo, from 22 to 27 September 2001 and its seventh annual meeting in New Delhi from 11 to 13 November 2002. Participants included the 12 national institution members of the Asia-Pacific Forum (Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand). Representatives of the national institutions of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as representatives of Governments of the region and international, regional and national non-governmental organizations participated as observers.

27. The present Chair of the Asia-Pacific Forum is the National Human Rights Commission of India.

Advisory Council of Jurists

28. The Forum's Advisory Council of Jurists met in parallel with the Asia-Pacific Forum meetings. The Council is comprised of eminent jurists from Forum member States who, in an independent capacity, provide advice to the Forum members. At its last annual meeting, Forum members were advised on the issue of trafficking. The secretariat of the Forum was asked to gather the necessary information to assist in implementing the Council's recommendations. The Council had previously provided advice on the issues of the death penalty and child pornography. It has now been called upon by the Forum members to provide advice regarding terrorism.

Europe

Sixth Annual Conference of European Ombudsmen

29. The Sixth Annual Conference of European Ombudsmen, hosted by the Commissioner for Civil Rights Protection of Poland, was held in Krakow, Poland, from 22 to 24 May 2002. The Conference, which OHCHR attended, reviewed the role of the Ombudsmen under extreme and extraordinary circumstances and discussed how ombudsmen could provide more effective protection for refugees and the role of the ombudsman vis-à-vis the international community, international human rights institutions and humanitarian law.

Second Council of Europe Round Table of National Human Rights Institutions; Fourth European Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions

30. The Second Council of Europe Round Table of National Human Rights Institutions was held in Dublin from 14 to 16 November 2002. It was followed by the Fourth European Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions.

31. The Round Table was attended by five European national institutions, which have been accredited by the Credentials Committee of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions as being in accordance with the Paris Principles, and a number of other European institutions with both broad-based and sector-specific mandates. The discussion focused on asylum-seekers, the role of national institutions in conflict, and cooperation between the Council of Europe, the United Nations and national institutions.

32. An important part of the discussion was the role of national institutions in the work of the European Court of Human Rights. In this regard, the Council of Europe agreed to take into account the views of national institutions on how the Court could function more effectively and deal more readily with the ever-increasing number of complaints submitted to it. The national institutions established a working group to pursue this issue.

33. With respect to the Fourth European Meeting of National Institutions, the Council of Europe highlighted the importance of national institutions in its work and indicated that its Commissioner for Human Rights would take primary responsibility for this work. The Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme of France took over from the Danish Institute for Human Rights as the Coordinator of European national institutions.

III. Other activities of national institutions

34. Meeting in Paris from 29 to 31 May 2002, the national institutions of la Francophonie agreed to the formation of the Association francophone des commissions nationales de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme. The Association was established to play an active role in strengthening existing francophone national institutions through the promotion and development of cooperation programmes, in the exchange of expertise and in providing follow-up to the Bamako Declaration on democracy, rights and freedoms, adopted in November 2000, the Association adopted its statutes and elected its Executive Board, with the Comité sénégalais des droits de l'homme elected Chair and the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme of France designated as its secretariat.

35. The Seventh Annual Congress of the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen was held in Lisbon from 18 to 20 November 2002. Under the global theme "The ombudsman, new competencies, new functions", the Congress discussed the following topics: mediation of the ombudsman in conflicts between the Government and citizens; good governance as a right of citizenship; monitoring and evaluating public policies; and the ombudsman's intervention in the business sector.

IV. Cooperation between human rights treaty bodies and national institutions

36. Treaty monitoring bodies regularly request States parties to provide information relating to the establishment of national human rights institutions. The National Institutions Team, in cooperation with the Support Services Branch, has brought to the attention of the treaty bodies the important role national institutions can play in translating international standards at the national level and in monitoring their implementation. The secretariats of the treaty bodies regularly consult the National Institutions Team about the work of national institutions in a country under consideration.

Joint European Union/OHCHR Project

37. A project on strengthening the implementation of human rights treaty body recommendations through the enhancement of national protection mechanisms has been developed between the European Union and OHCHR. This project aims at strengthening the national capacity of five target groups, including national human rights institutions. It will be implemented by conducting capacity-building and awareness-raising workshops in Geneva and in the field. Representatives of selected national institutions will attend treaty body sessions and regional workshops and will thus be in a position to follow the treaty body process, including the follow-up to concluding observations. The National Institutions Team will co-execute the joint EU/OHCHR project with other branches of the Office.

38. The National Institutions Team provided assistance to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in the preparation of its general comment No. 2, adopted in 2002, on the role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. The general comment underlines the national institutions' key role in the implementation and realization of children's rights. It encourages States parties to establish independent national institutions for the promotion and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or to review the effectiveness of existing institutions in relation to the promotion and protection of child rights. The Committee noted that among other functions, national institutions should be mandated to provide effective remedies for children who are victims of human rights violations. Two other treaty bodies have also adopted general comments/recommendations emphasizing the important role of national human rights institutions with regard to the implementation of the recommendations at the national level: the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (general recommendation XVII of 1993) and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (general comment No. 10 of 1998).

39. OHCHR participated in a workshop on using the United Nations mechanisms for protecting human rights, held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from 8 to 10 October 2002, which was hosted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission with the support of the British Council. The workshop, directed at national institutions, informed participants about United Nations human rights mechanisms, provided for a sharing of best practices among national institutions with regard to their experiences with the human rights mechanisms and explored ways to utilize various sources of information in relation to those mechanisms.

V. Cooperation between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations agencies and programmes, and international and regional organizations

40. Many activities and programmes for the establishment or strengthening of national institutions have been conducted in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), within the framework of the 1998 memorandum of understanding between OHCHR and UNDP. During the reporting period, four technical cooperation projects, in Ecuador, Mongolia, Rwanda and Uganda, were implemented jointly by OHCHR and UNDP. OHCHR, through its human rights adviser, is also regularly consulted by UNDP on capacity-building initiatives for the Nepal Human Rights Commission. OHCHR has reinitiated contacts with the United Nations Volunteers programme to provide support to national institutions, and is developing and implementing a pilot project for the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

41. OHCHR also cooperates in a number of initiatives with the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Cooperation has been strengthened with the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, including through the holding of regional meetings of national institutions. Partnerships with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, as well as with the British Council, remained active. It is anticipated that cooperation with regional institutions will continue to be strengthened by engaging with such institutions on a practical level.

VI. National human rights institutions and thematic issues

A. Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights

42. The promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights was one of the thematic issues discussed during the Fourth Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions (see para. 20 above). Participating African national institutions called upon African Governments to adopt a rights-based approach to development, particularly by focusing special attention on the eradication of poverty, the provision of basic education, the right to health and the right to an adequate standard of living. They called for the ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and for the implementation of legislative and administrative measures for the realization of the rights to health, shelter, food, safe water, education and employment.

43. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the National Institutions Team participated in the Third British Council International Human Rights Conference on the theme "Social and economic rights: beyond the rhetoric", held in Belfast, Northern Ireland, on 18 May 2002. The High Commissioner highlighted the importance of applying the international human rights norms at the national level and noted the importance of national institutions, in verifying the application of the norms by Governments.

44. The *Handbook on National Institutions and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* will be released in 2003.

B. Racism and racial discrimination

45. A regional workshop on national human rights institutions, human rights education, the media and racism was organized by the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions in Sydney, Australia, on 15 and 16 July 2002 with the support and participation of OHCHR. The objectives of this workshop were to strengthen and promote information exchanges, to establish best practice standards and to develop networks between national institutions, the media, OHCHR, Governments and regional and national non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights.

46. OHCHR, with the support of the Rockefeller and the Carnegie Foundations, assisted a number of national institutions in undertaking initiatives at the national level in relation to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, 2001). During the reporting period, OHCHR supported the Reconstructing Race Relations Workshop, held in Suva on 30 August 2002 and organized by the Fiji Human Rights Commission, which benefited from the support of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Small grants

47. The National Institutions Team has initiated, in close cooperation with the Anti-Discrimination Unit of OHCHR, a new series of small grants to national institutions in order to support practical and grass-roots activities on the follow-up to the World Conference. This new initiative will be implemented in the second half of 2003.

C. Rights of the child

48. As described in paragraph 38 above, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted general comment No. 2 on the role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

D. Rights of persons with disabilities

49. National institutions were closely involved in the drafting of the study, commissioned by OHCHR, on human rights and disability. The National Institutions Team has been extensively involved in informing national institutions about the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee has agreed to permit national institutions to participate independently in its discussions.

50. The national institutions of the four regional groupings have all discussed the importance of the rights of persons with disabilities and the possible drafting of an international convention relating to the protection of persons with disabilities, with the support and participation of OHCHR. The Network of National Human Rights

Institutions of the Americas convened a workshop in Costa Rica in March 2003 to discuss the role of national institutions in addressing the issue of the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities at the international, regional and national levels.

51. Similarly, a workshop on disability for national institutions from the countries of the Commonwealth and the Asia-Pacific Region, entitled "Promoting the rights of people with disabilities: towards a new United Nations convention", was held in New Delhi from 26 to 30 May 2003, with the support of the British Council. The conclusions and recommendations adopted were channelled into the work of the Ad Hoc Committee. In addition, African human rights institutions, with the help and assistance of OHCHR, held a regional seminar to discuss the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in preparation for the second session of the Ad Hoc Committee. The regional workshop took place in Uganda; it adopted general conclusions and recommendations which were also included in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee.

52. Some 15 national institutions from all over the world attended the second session of the Ad Hoc Committee, held in New York from 16 to 27 June 2003. They made three joint statements. It was decided to include a representative of the national human rights institutions accredited to the International Coordinating Committee in the working group established to prepare and present a draft text of a convention.

E. Prevention of torture

53. The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, opens the possibility for Governments that ratify it to use national human rights institutions as national preventive mechanisms. In this context, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, a Geneva-based NGO, organized in cooperation with OHCHR, a seminar on domestic visiting mechanisms around the world: practices and lessons learned. The seminar, held from 2 to 4 July 2003, aimed at enabling representatives from a variety of existing mechanisms for visits to places of detention to share experiences and drew lessons from the methodology, functioning and effectiveness of various types of visiting mechanisms. A number of representatives of national institutions took part in the seminar, whose conclusions will be published shortly.

F. Reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS

54. A regional workshop on reproductive rights, organized by OHCHR in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights, was held in San José from 14 to 16 May 2002. A follow-up workshop on the promotion and protection of reproductive rights through the work of the ombudsmen of the Caribbean was organized by OHCR, again in Costa Rica with the cooperation of the Institute and UNFPA, from 18 to 20 March 2003.

55. OHCHR supports the capacity of national institutions to address HIV/AIDS-related human rights issues by encouraging them to investigate and respond to HIV/AIDS-related human rights violations, provide human rights education in the

context of HIV/AIDS, and support and advise Governments on the integration of human rights principles and standards into national policies and legislation on HIV/AIDS. OHCHR is working closely with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS to support national institutions in strengthening the focus on HIV/AIDS-related issues within their respective mandates and activities, including by developing training materials. It is anticipated that a handbook on the role of national institutions and HIV/AIDS will be drafted in 2003.

VII. Conclusions

56. OHCHR will continue to strengthen established national human rights institutions and provide support to Member States that are in the process of establishing such institutions. It will provide practical advice to the growing number of countries requesting it, improve United Nations system-wide coordination of the work of national institutions and increase the participation of national institutions in the appropriate United Nations human rights bodies and other international forums. OHCHR will encourage the sharing of best practices among national institutions and facilitate their access to relevant information. Greater emphasis will be placed on building the knowledge and expertise of United Nations country teams on national institutions. Similarly, the inclusion of national institutions in the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework process will be encouraged. Responding to the Secretary-General's call to reflect on the role of national institutions in conflict and post-conflict resolution, particular attention will be paid to this area.

57. Holding regional and international meetings of national institutions to promote the exchange of information and experience concerning the establishment and effective operation of such institutions has proved an effective mechanism for strengthening those institutions. Nevertheless, Governments and the other partners of OHCHR must ensure that the United Nations standards with regard to national institutions are respected. OHCHR draws the attention of national institutions to the importance of the Paris Principles, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly in 1993, and invites them to reaffirm their validity and the necessity of complying with them.